

Accomplishments 2005

by Inez M. Tenenbaum



There is overwhelming evidence that South Carolina is leading the nation in educational improvement, and never in our state's history has there been so much to celebrate. We are realizing our vision of a system through which all students will become educated, responsible, and contributing citizens.

Systemic education reform takes a comprehensive and sustained approach. That's why in 1999, I identified six areas of emphasis: accountability, early childhood education, teacher quality, school leadership, safe and healthy schools, and parent and community involvement. That concentration has charted our course for the past six years, and we are seeing remarkable results.

We have worked to raise academic achievement by developing new standards and providing our teachers the kind of training they require to ensure that students get what they need to be successful. As a matter of fact, South Carolina's efforts to improve academic standards and accountability were ranked sixth place nationally this year by *Education Week's* annual report "Quality Counts 2005."

South Carolina's academic standards have been recognized by six independent studies as among the most rigorous in the nation, and thanks to the hard work being put forth by everyone, student achievement is at an all-time high. In statewide PACT testing, our students have made significant gains across all grade levels, subjects, and demographic groups, and our state's high school exit exam scores continue to improve. For the fourth consecutive year, our students are scoring above the national average in reading, lan-

guage, and math on the nationally standardized TerraNova test. Our eighth-graders met or exceeded the international average in the Third International Math and Science Study, which compares student test scores in 38 nations. And three separate national research studies have named South Carolina as one of the top states in improving student scores on federal NAEP tests required by No Child Left Behind.

Because today's brain research shows the importance of the first three to five years in establishing a solid foundation for future educational success, it's encouraging that school readiness is also improving. The biggest improvements are being made by minority students and students from low-income families.

Our high school seniors have improved their average SAT score by 32 points in the past five years, the largest gain in the country and three times the national increase. South Carolina is one of only three states in the nation that has increased high school seniors' scores on the ACT college entrance exam over the past five years, despite doubling the number of students who took the examination. Add to that the fact that our last three graduating classes of high school seniors have won more than \$1.2 billion in college scholarships, and there should be no doubt that Palmetto State students can compete with any students in the nation.

But the accomplishments of our students do not end in the classroom. Across the state, our youth are engaged in community service projects linked to their academic studies. Each year, more than 100,000 of them volunteer more than a million hours of community service – another feat for which we have been recognized nationally.

(continued)

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Rural Schools' Story Told

by Dr. Jean Norman

The story of South Carolina's rural school districts is told in a video documentary introduced by author Pat Conroy. The documentary, *Corridor of Shame*, describes the conditions in schools in the eight school districts that are plaintiffs in a legal action against the state. Their case is built around the issue of 'adequate educa-



tion' for all South Carolina children regardless of where they live in the state.

Focused on the condition of the physical facilities, the economic and social issues, and the aspirations teachers and parents have for their children, the documentary lets the pictures of students and the voices of parents, school and district staff, and

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Mark Your Calendar!

Annual SIC District Contact Meeting

SEPTEMBER 21, 2005

ETV - COLUMBIA

2005 SIC Regional Conferences

OCTOBER 29, 2005

MARRIOTT GREENVILLE

NOVEMBER 5, 2005

MARRIOTT COLUMBIA

NOVEMBER 12, 2005

SHERATON NORTH CHARLESTON

Riley Award

The deadline for the 2006 Riley Award application has not been set, but will likely be some time in November. Visit the SC-SIC website to view the 2005 application and begin planning your application now. Details on this year's awards process will be posted on the website soon and will also be included in the Back to School issue of *Council News*.



SIC Action Timeline

June & July

- Complete the School Report Card narrative in conjunction with the principal by June 15
- Review bylaws and draft revisions if needed
- Recruit parents to stand for (fall) election to the SIC
- Identify non-parent community members to serve on the SIC
- Analyze results of the surveys completed by parents, teachers, and students in grades 5, 8, and 11 and make plans to address areas needing improvement

August

- Coordinate preparations for fall SIC elections of parents and teachers, and students grades 9-12
- Prepare a notebook for each new SIC member including SIC Handbook, last year's minutes, Report to the Parents, bylaws, membership roster and strategic plan goals for 2005-06
- Recommend bylaw revisions for approval
- Review criteria for the Dick and Tunky Riley School Improvement Award in preparation for applying
- Order lapel pins for all SIC members from SC-SIC (not required but nice to have!)



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Message from... the Executive Director

Looking Ahead - Building Bridges

Another school year has come to an end and we are in the midst of planning for next year. As many of you have done, we reflected upon what we did well and what still needed to be done to be effective. Information from those we serve has always provided us with good direction and suggestions for action...so we asked.

Principals were surveyed online and reported how they value their councils, how they worked with the councils, and what support they provided to the councils. From that data we have learned what is *not* occurring as well as it should/could and where the gaps are that SC-SIC could bridge.

We also asked a group of SIC chairs to talk to us about the SIC, their leadership role, relationship with their principals, and the challenges to their effective operations. From that data we learned that they need more detailed information, that direct contact with SC-SIC for support is desired, and that a clear understanding of their role on the SIC would improve the collaboration between the SIC leadership and the administration. They identified strategies for SC-SIC to bridge the information and knowledge gap early in the school year.

Preparation during the summer for the new school year is recommended and encouraged. It is time to prepare newly elected members, recruit community members, plan the fall election (or orient the new SIC members if spring elections were held), analyze survey data, revise bylaws, plan with the principal about next year's goals, and/or meet with the PTA/O, booster club or other groups to build relationships for working together next year.

The SC-SIC staff is looking ahead to next year planning ways to get information to SIC members easier and earlier. In the meantime, the resources listed on page five are available now and council members are encouraged to access them in whatever form is most beneficial – in print, in person, on video or on the Web. Use the summer to look ahead and build bridges to information, collaboration, and action.

Jean M. Norman

“Accomplishments”

Continued from page 1

Student success depends upon several factors, none more important than the classroom teacher. *Education Week's* “Quality Counts” has ranked South Carolina first or second in the nation for improving teacher quality in each of the past three years. We rank third in the nation in the number of teachers (3,226) certified by the prestigious National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

Just as our quest for a quality education for every child in South Carolina is not ours alone, neither are our accomplishments. They belong to the teacher who, after her own kids are asleep, grades papers until the wee hours of the morning. They belong to the custodian who takes pride in his shiny corridors and freshly mowed grass. They belong to the lady who sits in your pew, singing off-key each and every Sunday; the deli worker at the local grocery; the CEOs of our businesses and industries; and the plant worker who toils through ten-hour shifts. They belong to the parent who rises at 4 o'clock each morning to take that long bus ride to work. They belong to the many dedicated parents and volunteers who participate in the valuable work of School Improvement Councils across South Carolina. And they even belong to the senior citizen who doesn't have a child, or even a grandchild, still in school.

Make no mistake: Student achievement in South Carolina is not where we want it to be. If even one school struggles to deliver a top-quality education to its students, that is one school too many. It is our collective, continued commitment to our public schools that will move us closer toward the goal of a quality education for every child, in every classroom, in every school in South Carolina. We have made tremendous progress together, and the future looks even brighter. - *Ms. Tenenbaum is the state superintendent of education.*

“Story”

Continued from page 1

community leaders tell the story. Silence often greets the end of the viewing while people absorb what they have seen and learned.

Education First, a non-profit organization established to bring attention to the plight of the state's rural schools and the status of the lawsuit for equitable funding, promoted the development of the documentary. Last May the organization provided leadership and coordination for the “Fund Education Now” march to the Statehouse where nearly 5000 people demonstrated their support for education funding. This fall a series of town meetings were initiated across the state and organized by local community leaders to increase public awareness about the conditions leading to the lawsuit and the status of the trial. The documentary, paid for through private donations, is another means of bringing the story to the state's citizens.

A copy of the documentary was provided to every member of the General Assembly, the governor, all district superintendents, education related organizations, and civic organizations. *Corridor of Shame* is being shown in a variety of locations: movie theatres, churches, community centers, colleges and universities, and civic groups. For dates and locations where the documentary is being shown near you go to: www.corridorofshame.com.

SC-SIC has made arrangements for the video to be shown on streaming video on our website: www.ed.sc.edu and click on “Toolkit.” The video is also available from SC-SIC on loan for showing in your community. Call 800-868-2232 and make your request. - *Dr. Norman is a founding member of Children First.*

POINT OF VIEW

SC-SIC Board of Trustees Opinion and Commentary



Seeds of Success are Sown at Home

by Nell Stewart

Some years ago, there were two sisters who grew up on a farm in one of the “monetarily challenged” areas of South Carolina. They became parents. The children in one family completed high school, finished college, and earned one or more graduate degrees, including doctorates. All became responsible, productive citizens. The children in the other family did not complete their high school education and became a drain on society because of their irresponsible and/or criminal behavior. What was the difference?

Did one sister leave the area and move her children to a more supportive and progressive community? No. Both of them reared their families on the same farm where they grew up. Did one sister become a single parent with the full responsibility of her children? Yes. The one with the successful children was the single parent; the other had a husband in the home. Was it the lack of educational opportunities that caused the one family of children to fail? Both families grew up in the same community and attended the same schools where their mothers had studied. The economic and educational conditions were not the deciding factors in their lives. What was the difference?

Poverty alone is not the reason for failure to succeed. Many individuals from families with very little money have been successful in outstanding ways. Attitude about poverty is more powerful than the poverty itself. We need to give the poor a challenge to succeed, rather than an excuse to fail. In most cases, we need to give them a “hand up” when we are prone to give them a “handout.”

In our public education system I see two major detriments to students’ success,

regardless of the economic status. First is lack of parental involvement and equal to that is lack of discipline. Often, if parents do not show concern for their child’s education and respect for the educators, the student will not have the needed desire to succeed (there are always a few exceptions to this). If a child has not learned discipline at home, that child is not likely to behave well in school. And one undisciplined student can interrupt the learning for an entire classroom, regardless of the teacher/pupil ratio. Educators are not there to teach Discipline 101 to students. That is the job of parents.

In today’s schools, we expect teachers and administrators to assume too many roles: parent, counselor, nurse, statistician, disciplinarian, public relations specialist, and on and on – and “Oh, by the way, teach my child the subject matter perfectly, too.”

Are all teachers and administrators in our public education system all they should be? No. But the vast majority of them are caring, qualified, dedicated, hard-working individuals who are fighting harder today to do their jobs well than ever before. Parents, grandparents, and all citizens need to support the professionals who serve our children well and recognize their job is not an easy one. We need to show them our appreciation in a number of ways, only one of which is monetary. Our educational system in South Carolina is definitely making progress and I do not deny that we have funding needs; however, we must look at other cures for our problems as well. If we simply add dollars (as important as they are) we may have more expensive failures in some cases. We are already putting more tax dollars into some schools where stu-

dents are not making the progress we need to see, while other schools where we have less tax dollars per pupil are making good progress. This tells a thinking person that money is not the only thing needed to help many of our schools succeed.

Too often we deal with societal symptoms and blame the lack of money for all these problems, especially in the public education system. We add more funding, but find the problems continue. The source of the problem must be uncovered and treated before we can eliminate the symptoms and truly improve the opportunities for success.

Earlier, I asked the question, “What is the difference?” when some students succeed while others fail in a similar environment. Perhaps this is a good question for SICs to pose and seriously consider in the coming year. The thoughts expressed here about the source of the problem are only the first steps. Funding is vital, but there are other factors that are just as important, if not more so. We cannot leave the problem identification and solutions to only a few. Our public education system deserves the attention of all – if not altruistically, then selfishly. These students will govern our future quality of life. Let this be the year each of us vows that we will not fail our children in our public schools. Can you afford to stand aside and not become involved? I can’t! Our children are too important.

Nell Stewart lives in Greenville where she is a respected community activist and supporter of public schools. Ms. Stewart joined the SC-SIC Board of Trustees in 2002 and currently serves as vice chairperson. You may reach her at 864-232-3392 or nel561stew@aol.com

The “Willing Few” Make a Difference!

by Carlos Primus

The A. J. Lewis Greenview Elementary School Improvement Council is very proud to be the 2005 recipient of the Dick and Tunky Riley School Improvement Award. Our school is in Richland County School District One in Columbia and has approximately 550 students. Like many other schools in an inner city environment, Lewis Greenview faces a variety of challenges, but our SIC embraced these challenges as opportunities for success. The SIC is a small group of people although you may be surprised at how much a “willing few” can accomplish when they put their heads together!

We identified several issues of importance in our school and community. Because we view parent involvement as key to our students’ success, one of the most pressing was the need to reach out to *all* of the parents and non-traditional caregivers of the children in our schools. We initiated the DADS (Dads Are Doing Something) program to increase the male presence in our school and our grandparent program provides additional support for our students. We developed NPLB (No Parent Left Behind) to inform parents of PACT testing strategies and to help them understand PACT scores and the impact of the testing within our school.

The SIC recognized the correlation between academic success and physical and mental health issues in students’ homes. The result was the coordination of an annual health fair with a local church in our community to address the wellness needs of the Greenview neighborhood.

The SIC spearheaded partnerships with local businesses to develop and support community enrichment within the school and this year marked the kick-off of our High Performance Partnership program. This program has brought mentors, tutors, and other volunteers into the school in addition to funding sponsorships.

All of these efforts were designed to eliminate barriers between the school and the community as well as cultivate involvement in our school. We are constantly seeking ways to communicate our school’s needs to the surrounding communities. The A.J. Lewis Greenview SIC would like to share a few strategies that may help other SICs address challenges facing their schools:

- Identify the primary issues facing your school and develop an action plan. This will allow your council to focus its energy toward a few substantive issues rather than diverting energy and attention to a myriad of ideas.
- Set realistic goals and expectations. Every initiative is not going to generate mass interest among your constituencies. Be prepared to work with the willing few. A small group of dedicated and determined advocates can be a powerful force for positive achievements. Share your accomplishments with the school community and a few more will join you each step of the way.
- Finally, reflect on your accomplishments throughout the school year. The Dick and Tunky Riley School Improvement Award offers an excellent opportunity to look at how successful your SIC has been and to identify areas that can be strengthened. Remember to celebrate the small victories. The bigger victories are certainly forthcoming.

Have a safe and enjoyable summer. Get plenty of rest. There is a tremendous amount of work to do as we continue our important efforts as advocates for our children. – Mr. Primus is chair of the A.J. Lewis Greenview Elementary SIC. You may reach him at cprimus@sc.rr.com or 803-735-3417 for more information. To apply for the Riley Award visit www.ed.sc.edu/sic and click on Riley Award or call 800-868-2232.

Council News - Summer 2005

RESOURCES AVAILABLE FROM SC-SIC

Available in print, video and on the Web!

www.ed.sc.edu/sic

SIC Handbook - “The Basics”

Answers to every SIC member’s questions; available in print and video; also in Spanish

- Roles and responsibilities
- Membership and elections
- How to organize for effective action

“Council Updates”

Thirty-minute programs on current topics featuring guest experts; available in VHS, CD, or on the website in streaming video. New titles available every year.

- Understanding Education Funding - The Basics
- Understanding Education Funding - Beyond the Basics
- Grassroots Advocacy
- SIC Strategic Planning - Simplified
- Who’s at the Table? Your SIC Membership
- How to Be a Riley Award Winning SIC
- School Report Card
- Understanding AYP and Accountability
- Crafting the Report to the Parents
- Your Voice Matters
- Your Voice in Action

Newsletter - “Council News”

Distributed quarterly to all SIC members

Services and Assistance

- Toll free line: 800-868-2232
- Email: sic@gwm.sc.edu
- Web: www.ed.sc.edu/sic
 - All SC-SIC publications
 - Samples of “Report to the Parents”
 - Samples of Bylaws
 - Advocacy Guidelines
 - Links to other resources and more

Training

- Regional SIC Conferences

Open to all SIC members, Fall and Spring conferences feature workshops, speakers and opportunities for networking with other SIC members

Awards

- Dick & Tunky Riley School Improvement Award

Recognition of an exemplary School Improvement Council awarded annually based on a competitive application process

- SIC Advocate of the Year Award

Presented annually by SC-SIC Board to an individual or group that has consistently supported the role of School Improvement Councils in South Carolina



LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

The following is a quick overview of what happened with some key education legislation in the SC General Assembly during the current legislative session. Remember that this is the first year of a two year legislative session, so any legislation introduced this year that was not acted upon will be carried over next year. Visit www.scstatehouse.net to read the legislation. Several education organizations offer regular legislative updates on their websites and through email. Visit the SC School Boards Association at www.scsba.org, The SCEA at www.thescea.org, Palmetto State Teachers Association at www.palmettoteachers.org, and the SC Association of School Administrators at www.scasa.org to learn more. To receive regular emails on current education issues sign up for EdBlast at www.myschools.com.

Tuition Tax Credits

The hotly debated tuition tax credit bill known as Put Parents in Charge (H3652) was defeated in the House. Other versions of the bill (H3012, H3204, and H4054) have been proposed and the topic is expected to be revived next year. No companion bill has been introduced in the Senate.

Education and Economic Development Act

Governor Sanford has signed this act (R102), which will compel high schools to offer career tracks and provide additional career and guidance counseling. The legislation received high marks from the business community and is expected to better prepare students to enter the workforce.

Student Health and Fitness Act

Also signed into law (R129) by the governor, this act establishes physical fitness and nutrition standards for elementary schools only. It will require each school to have a school nurse, a coordinated school health advisory council, and to offer nutritious foods in vending machines.

Education Budget

For the first time in several years the legislature has funded public schools according to the funding formula adopted in 1977. The budget increase means that the state will provide \$2,290 per pupil in the coming school year. This action increases school funding by about \$315 million over last year.

